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Selective Memory: British Perceptions of the Herero–Nama Genocide, 1904–1908 and 1918

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This article examines British officials' perceptions of, and degree of involvement in, the Herero–Nama war and subsequent genocide in German South-West Africa in 1904–8. By examining contemporary British correspondence on this event and comparing it to the British 'Blue Book' of 1918, the article shows that British officials were far more interested in retaining stability than in the suffering of Africans in German territory at the time of the genocide. Nevertheless, by 1918 they used this event as an instrument to confiscate Germany's colonies. Being part of a wider transnational approach to German colonial history, this article challenges the idea of German colonial exceptionalism and the approach to this genocide within a historical framework of the Third Reich. Instead, this event should be understood within the wider transnational context of imperial history.

Introduction

In 1904, after years of oppression, the Herero people of Namibia, then German South-West Africa (GSWA), took up arms against their colonial oppressors. The conflict began with a quick offensive, where the Germans were caught by surprise, leaving between 123 and 150 settlers dead.¹ Although women and children were spared by the Herero, cries for vengeance would soon consume the colony. In August 1904, the German *Schutztruppe* (literally 'protection force', the official name for German colonial troops in Africa), deployed to quell the rebellion, not so much defeated as butchered the Herero rebels at the ill-named 'battle' of Waterberg. The survivors fleeing from this massacre soon found themselves in one of the planet's most unforgiving terrains: the Omaheke desert. Those not killed by the desert were ruthlessly hunted down by the *Schutztruppe* after the proclamation of General Lothar von Trotha's extermination order. To the south, the traditional arch-enemies of the Herero, the Nama, also took up arms against the Germans, and soon the conflict descended into guerrilla war. Inspired by British methods during the second Anglo-Boer war (1899–1902), the Germans established prison camps intended for the entire Herero and Nama populations, including civilians. These camps have been labelled as concentration camps, and in the case of the Shark Island camp, near the town of Lüderitz, a death camp. The inmates were kept under terrible conditions, experimented upon by physicians and used as forced labourers by the Germans.² It is, therefore, no surprise that the terrible events that transpired in GSWA have been called the first genocide of the 20th century and are frequently seen in the context of the Holocaust that took place less than 40 years later.³ In consequence, German colonialism has largely been considered exceptionally cruel in comparison to other colonial powers. This has not only led to suggestions of continuity between these two genocides, it has also rekindled various implicit forms of the *Sonderweg* discourse, which proposes Germany took a unique 'special path' leading to the Third Reich.⁴

1 J. Bridgman, *The Revolt of the Hereros* (Berkeley, University of California Press, 1981), pp. 73–74.

2 For a detailed account of the war and genocide see C. Erichsen and D. Olusoga, *The Kaiser's Holocaust: Germany's Forgotten Genocide and the Colonial Roots of Nazism* (London, Faber & Faber, 2010). See also C. Erichsen, 'The Angel of Death Has Descended Violently among Them': *Concentration Camps and Prisoners-of-War in Namibia, 1904–1908* (Leiden, African Studies Centre, 2005).

3 The term 'genocide' was applied first in H. Dreschler, 'Let Us Die Fighting': *The Struggle of the Herero and Nama against German Imperialism (1884–1915)*, trans. B. Zollner (London, Zed Press, 1980). See also H. Bley, *South-West Africa under German Rule, 1894–1914* (London, Heinemann, 1971).

4 M. Fitzpatrick, 'The Pre-History of the Holocaust? The *Sonderweg* and Historikerstreit Debates and the Abject Colonial Past', *Central European History*, 41, 3 (2008), p. 503. For the *Sonderweg*, see, among several titles, H-U. Wehler, 'Bismarck's Imperialism 1862–1890', *Past & Present*, 48, 1 (1970), pp. 119–150; W. Mommsen, *Der Autoritäre Nationalstaat. Verfassung, Gesellschaft und Kultur in deutschen Kaiserreich* (Frankfurt-am-Main, Fischer

It is inviting to examine these brutalities from a British perspective for several reasons. Geographically, GSWA bordered the British colonies of Bechuanaland and the Cape Colony, and, diplomatically, Anglo-German relations at the time have traditionally been considered antagonistic at best.⁵ For example, the Foreign Office Blue Book of 1918, a detailed British report of the genocide, called for the confiscation of Germany's overseas colonies by illustrating German maladministration. By exploring how British officials in London and southern Africa acted on and perceived the conflict in GSWA, both contemporaneously and in 1918, this article will shed light upon the entanglement of Anglo-German southern Africa and how these atrocities were revisited just before the peace negotiations at Versailles.⁶ This conforms to the turn towards transnational history, which has established that colonial borders were neither segregated entities nor national borders extended from Europe.⁷ Several historians, including Sebastian Conrad and Ulrike Lindner, have sought to explore a wider framework in which German colonialism interacted intimately with its colonial neighbours and subjects.⁸ Considering the fragile state of British southern Africa after the recent war, however, the conflict in GSWA deeply affected British anxieties regarding the stability of the region. British concerns, such as fears of a German-backed Boer rising, emanating from the war in GSWA, featured prominently in communications between the government in London and the South African colonies. Conversely, there are clear indications that German colonialism was inspired by its British counterpart.⁹ For example, GSWA governor Theodor Leutwein often voiced his admiration of Britain's 'native policy'.¹⁰ Indeed, this entanglement has led some historians to argue that there was a common 'colonial project' between Britain and Germany aimed against the Africans.¹¹ Therefore, to understand the context of the conflict and genocide in GSWA, British perceptions and actions therein will help broaden our understanding of colonialism in a transnational context, while placing the notion of German colonial exceptionalism under scrutiny.

Unsurprisingly, the genocide in GSWA is the most frequently used example of German colonialism related to the Holocaust – if not explicitly, then implicitly. This is based on long-standing suppositions that the Holocaust was European imperialism turned on itself.¹² In a similar vein, Jürgen Zimmerer argues that a continuity rooted in a 'global history of mass violence' existed between GSWA and the Holocaust.¹³ Although Zimmerer does not suggest any mono-causality, he draws key parallels and structural continuities between the two events and contends that the

Taschenbuch Verlag, 1990). For a contrasting view, see G. Eley and D. Blackbourne, *The Peculiarities of German History: Bourgeois Society and Politics in Nineteenth-Century Germany* (Oxford, Oxford University Press, 1984).

5 See P. Kennedy, *The Rise of Anglo-German Antagonism 1860–1914* (London, Ashfield Press, 1980).

6 In this article, 'British' refers to the British Empire as a whole (i.e., South Africa and London are here converged).

7 Studying Germany and Britain in Africa may be dated back to P. Gifford and W. Roger Louis (eds), *Britain and Germany in Africa: Imperial Rivalry and Colonial Rule* (New Haven, Yale University Press, 1967). For a recent transnational contribution, see, for instance, V. Barth and R. Cvetkovski (eds), *Imperial Co-operation and Transfer, 1870–1930: Empires and Encounters* (London, Bloomsbury, 2015).

8 Several titles on German colonialism with a transnational scope have been published in recent years. See especially S. Conrad, *German Colonialism: A Short History* (Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 2012), and *Globalisation and the Nation in Imperial Germany* (Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 2010); J. Leonhard and U. von Hirschhausen, *Comparing Empires: Encounters and Transfers in the Nineteenth and Early Twentieth Century* (Göttingen, Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 2011); B. Naranch and G. Eley (eds), *German Colonialism in a Global Age* (Durham, Duke University Press, 2014).

9 U. Lindner, *Koloniale Begegnungen: Deutschland und Großbritannien als Imperialmächte in Afrika 1880–1914* (Frankfurt-am-Main, Campus Verlag, 2011), p. 254.

10 J.H. Wellington, *German Southwest Africa and its Human Issues* (Oxford, Oxford University Press, 1967), p. 235.

11 See Lindner, *Koloniale Begegnungen*; M. Fröhlich, *Von Konfrontation zur Koexistenz: Die deutsch-englischen Kolonialbeziehungen in Afrika zwischen 1884 und 1914* (Bochum, Brockmeyer, 1990); Dreschler, "Let Us Die Fighting", p. 138.

12 H. Arendt, *The Origins of Totalitarianism* (New York, Harcourt, Brace and Co., 1951); A. Césaire, *Discourse on Colonialism*, trans. J. Pinkham (New York, Monthly Review Press, 2000).

13 J. Zimmerer, 'War, Concentration Camps and Genocide', in J. Zimmerer and J. Zeller (eds), *Genocide in German South-West Africa: The Colonial War of 1904–1908 and its Aftermath*, trans. E.J. Neather (London, Merlin Press, 2008), p. 60.

genocide in GSWA should be studied ‘in reference to later developments’.¹⁴ Similarly, David Olusoga and Casper Erichsen suggest continuity in terms of racist ideas and practices through the placement of certain individuals, such as Joseph Mengele’s eugenicist mentor Eugen Fischer, who conducted research in GSWA.¹⁵ Perhaps the most explicit advocate for German exceptionalism and a rekindled *Sonderweg* is Jeremy Sarkin, who claims that the practices of the Holocaust were not only inspired by Germany’s colonial past but were developed in GSWA.¹⁶ It remains clear that, as Conrad, Birthe Kundrus and, to an extent, Zimmerer have shown, parallels between colonialism in Africa and the Nazi empire existed.¹⁷ Parallels, however, prove neither continuity nor causality.¹⁸ As Susanne Kuss has convincingly shown, the war in GSWA was unique and escalated into genocide owing to local circumstances, and therefore Germany’s colonial past cannot be generalised as having similar exterminatory practices to those of the Third Reich.¹⁹ Furthermore, a transnational critique, while not automatically repudiating claims of continuity, complicates the matter by questioning the basis from which it derives.

While parallels and, to some extent, continuities exist, it remains problematic that German colonialism and the Third Reich continue to be studied within the same framework, because it indicates exceptionalism and contains GSWA within a German national historic narrative.²⁰ This is evident not only with, for instance, Zimmerer, but to a much greater and *Sonderweg*-indicative extreme, with Sarkin and Benjamin Madley.²¹ Indeed, Reinhart Kössler has pointed out that if a trajectory in which continuity from GSWA to the Holocaust is constructed within German history, ‘the overall question of colonialism is easily lost sight of’.²² It is impossible here to cover fully the extensive historiography of GSWA and the ‘continuity debate’.²³ But it seems clear that despite claims that the *Sonderweg* is no longer the dominating view on German history,²⁴ it remains a deep-rooted historiographical tendency that influences the general perception of German colonial history, both in academia and in popular culture.²⁵

14 A. Eckl, ‘The Herero Genocide of 1904: Source Critical and Methodological Considerations’, *Journal of Namibian Studies*, 3 (2008), p. 56. See also J. Zimmerer, *Von Windhuk nach Auschwitz? Beiträge zum Verhältnis von Kolonialismus und Holocaust* (Münster, Lit Verlag, 2011).

15 Erichsen and Olusoga, *The Kaiser’s Holocaust*, pp. 250–51.

16 J. Sarkin, *Germany’s Genocide of the Herero – Kaiser Wilhelm II, His General, His Settlers, His Soldiers* (Cape Town, UCT Press, 2010), pp. 20–22. See also Isabel Hull, *Absolute Destruction: Military Culture and the Practices of War in Imperial Germany* (Ithaca, Cornell University Press, 2006), which claims that there was a military culture carried on from the colonies to the Third Reich.

17 S. Conrad, *German Colonialism*, p. 4, and B. Kundrus, ‘From the Herero to Holocaust? Some Remarks on the Current Debate’, *Africa Spectrum*, 40, 2 (2005), pp. 299–308.

18 T. Kühne, ‘Colonialism and the Holocaust: Continuities, Causations, and Complexities’, *Journal of Genocide Research*, 15, 3 (2013), p. 340.

19 S. Kuss, *Deutsches Militär auf kolonialen Kriegsschauplätzen: Eskalation von Gewalt zu Beginn des 20. Jahrhunderts* (Berlin, Christoph Links Verlag, 2010). For another comparison to Germany’s other colonial ventures, see also George Steinmetz, *The Devil’s Handwriting – Precoloniality and the German Colonial State in Qingdao, Samoa and Southwest Africa* (Chicago, University of Chicago Press, 2008).

20 Indeed, P. Gosse sought to establish a ‘conceptual framework’ in studying GSWA and the Holocaust together in ‘What Does National Socialism Have to Do with Colonialism? A Conceptual Framework’, in E. Ames, M. Klotz and L. Wildenthal (eds), *Germany’s Colonial Pasts* (Lincoln, University of Nebraska Press, 2005), p. 118.

21 B. Madley, ‘From Africa to Auschwitz: How German South West Africa Incubated Ideas and Methods Adopted and Developed by the Nazis in Eastern Europe’, *European History Quarterly*, 35, 3 (2005), pp. 429–64.

22 R. Kössler, ‘Genocide in Namibia, the Holocaust and the Issue of Colonialism’, *Journal of Southern African Studies*, 38, 1 (2012), p. 237.

23 For recent historiographical reviews, see, for instance, Kühne, ‘Colonialism and the Holocaust’, and S. Conrad, ‘Rethinking German Colonialism in a Global Age’, *Journal of Imperial and Commonwealth History*, 41, 4 (2013), pp. 543–66.

24 H. Winkler, *Germany: The Long Road West*, trans. Alexander Sager, vol. 1 (New York, Oxford University Press, 2006), pp. 1–2.

25 U. Lindner, ‘German Colonialism and the British Neighbour in Africa before 1914’, in V. Langbehn and M. Salama (eds), *German Colonialism – Race, the Holocaust and Postwar Germany* (New York, Columbia University Press, 2011), p. 255. For an excellent discussion of the implications of drawing parallels, continuities and so on, see B. Kundrus, ‘Continuities, Parallels, Receptions: Reflections on the “Colonisation” of National Socialism’, *Journal of Namibian Studies*, 4 (2008), pp. 25–46, and R. Kössler, *Namibia and Germany: Negotiating the Past* (Windhoek, University of

Perhaps the most vocal attempt to refute the claims of exceptionalism and continuity were made by Robert Gewarth and Stephan Malinowski. By cross-examining different studies of German and non-German historiography, they have shown that the war in GSWA was far more similar to other colonial conflicts, such as the Spanish in Cuba and the American invasion of the Philippines, than the wars and excesses of Nazi Germany.²⁶ Indeed, neither brutish colonial warfare nor genocide were unique to German colonialism.²⁷ Hence such comparative and transnational studies highlight the importance of understanding German colonial rule in a broader context, in which the interactions and reciprocal views of colonial officials concerning violence and colonial rule are revealed.

It is not the aim here to justify or call for revision of the verdict of genocide, as Brigitte Lau has attempted.²⁸ As shown by Jan-Bart Gewald, the intention behind Trotha's extermination order cannot be questioned, despite being criticised by German officers and officials and its eventual retraction.²⁹ As Lindner has shown, attempting to understand the colonial spheres as an entangled network may complicate the rather deterministic conclusions of *Sonderweg*-related literature pointing to German colonial exceptionalism and continuity.³⁰ Spearheaded by Lindner and Tilman Dederling, several works have been published attempting to understand German colonialism in GSWA in a regional context.³¹ These works have revealed how governance in one colony affected the governance of others.³² Where this article differs from, or rather complements, the existing historiography, is in its cross-examination of the Blue Book, which receives little attention from Lindner and others working on GSWA in a transnational light.³³ While the Blue Book has received scholarly attention, it has not been comprehensively compared to sources from 1904–8. Nevertheless, Christina Twomey has made a valuable contribution in her analysis of the creation of the Blue Book in the context of diplomatic interests developing during the First World War.³⁴

In addition to analysing this event from the view of contemporaries, this article will add a chronological dimension to the transnational critique of the continuity thesis and suggestions of German exceptionalism by showing that perceptions of colonial violence were dependent on circumstances and intentions. In the case of GSWA, the official British view can be roughly divided into two chronological stages: 1904–1908, and then 1918, with the backdrop of the First World War, where the genocide was revisited by British officials in the Blue Book. In this source, we are faced with an official attempt to 'remember' the historical circumstances in a different diplomatic setting.

Namibia Press, 2015), pp. 84–5. For popular culture, see the BBC documentary, 'Racism: A History', part 2 (2007).

26 R. Gewarth and S. Malinowski, 'Hannah Arendt's Ghosts: Reflections on the Disputable Path from Windhoek to Auschwitz', *Central European History*, 42, 2 (2009), pp. 279–300. See also F. Schumacher, 'Kulturtransfer und Empire. Britisches Vorbild und US-amerikanische Kolonialherrschaft auf den Philippinen im frühen 20. Jahrhundert', in C. Kraft, R. Lüdke and J. Martschukat (eds), *Kolonialgeschichten. Regionale Perspektive auf ein globales Phänomen* (Frankfurt-am-Main, Campus Verlag, 2010), pp. 306–27.

27 Kühne, 'Colonialism and the Holocaust', p. 343.

28 B. Lau, 'Uncertain Certainties', *Mibigaus*, 2 (1989). Reprinted later in B. Lau, *History and Historiography, 4 Essays in Reprint* (Windhoek, Discourse/MSORP, 1995). For a comprehensive reply, see W. Hillebrecht, 'Certain Uncertainties', *Journal of Namibian Studies*, 1 (2007), pp. 73–95, and T. Dederling, 'The German–Herero War of 1904: Revisionism of Genocide or Imaginary Historiography', *Journal of Southern African Studies*, 19, 1 (1993), pp. 80–88.

29 For an excellent analysis of the 'genocide debate' and the extermination order, see J-B. Gewald, 'The Great General of the Kaiser', *Botswana Notes and Records*, 26 (1994), pp. 67–76.

30 See Lindner, *Koloniale Begegnungen*, and 'Encounters Over the Border: The Shaping of Colonial Identities in Neighbouring British and German Colonies in Southern Africa', in Lindner et al., *Hybrid Cultures, Nervous States: Britain and Germany in a (Post)Colonial World* (Leiden, Brill, 2010), pp. 2–22.

31 Also, P. Curson, *Border Conflicts in a German African Colony: Jakob Morenga and the Untold Tragedy of Edward Presgrave* (Bury, Arena Books, 2012).

32 T. Dederling, 'The Ferreira Raid of 1906: Boers, Britons and Germans in Southern Africa in the Aftermath of the South African War', *Journal of Southern African Studies*, 26, 1 (2000), pp. 43–60, and 'War and Mobility in the Borderlands of South Western Africa in the Early Twentieth Century', *International Journal of African Historical Studies*, 39, 2 (2006), pp. 275–94.

33 Lindner, *Koloniale Begegnungen*, p. 252.

34 C. Twomey, 'Narratives and Imperial Rivalry: Britain, Germany and the Treatment of "Native Races", 1904–1939', in T. Crook and B. Taithe (eds), *Evil, Barbarism and Empire: Britain and Abroad, c. 1830–2000* (London, Palgrave Macmillan, 2011), pp. 201–25.

This leads to the question of how the perception of the genocide in 1918 compared to that of contemporary views in 1904–8. What follows is an examination of the 1918 representation of the events in the Blue Book, followed by an investigation into the contemporary perception of the genocide by British officials.

The View from Versailles

As the Great War came to an end, the belligerents met at Versailles to discuss the future not only of Europe but of the world. Having been compiled in the wake of the South African invasion of GSWA in 1915, the Blue Book, titled *Report on the Natives of South-West Africa and their Treatment by Germany*, claimed that Germany was guilty of maladministration of its colonies. Despite the report's propagandistic aims, it has been used frequently by historians as a source to describe the horrors that occurred in GSWA. In fact, this source is of such importance that Jeremy Silvester and Jan-Bart Gewald saw fit to re-publish it in 2004, the centennial of the genocide.³⁵ After its initial publication in 1918, Germany responded to the Blue Book by publishing the fittingly named White Book. The White Book attempted to counter the claims of the Blue Book by asserting that British imperialism too had seen its share of excesses.³⁶ This reveals the place of colonialism at Versailles, where the previous conduct of imperial powers could be wielded as a diplomatic weapon. As the Blue Book was published 10 years after the genocide, this suggests the British were either unaware of the genocide until the invasion in 1915, or that they knew of it but saw no reason to make it known to the world at this time.

Although the Blue and White Books illustrate deviation between the two empires, colonial southern Africa, in particular, was an entangled region. Many British and Boer settlers lived in German territory, while Africans, merchants and travellers moved across the border every day, bringing with them information and knowledge. Nevertheless, the British neighbour in southern Africa has largely been underestimated as a factor in the genocide, with the template of concentration camps often considered the only major connection. This fails to recognise the complicated patterns in which colonies were shaped by both rivalry and co-operation between imperial powers and locals, causing colonial administration to be closely followed by others.³⁷ Indeed, German officials were sensitive to how they were perceived, especially by British actors operating in GSWA and beyond.³⁸

Such sensitivity reveals that the treatment of indigenous peoples was central to how the colonial powers interacted and perceived one another, indicating an implicit 'code of conduct' regarding colonial rule. Indeed, this 'code of conduct' may be traced back to the many treaties of the 19th century concerning Africa, such as the Berlin Treaty of 1885.³⁹ In transferring the European concert to Africa, these treaties ostensibly laid down the rules for the scramble for Africa and reveal certain moral principles on the governance of colonies: principles which, if broken, could have potential diplomatic or propagandistic consequences. It was in this context, as well as the context of German defeat in the Great War, that the Blue Book was published, as a means to justify Britain's and her allies' takeover of Germany's overseas colonies.⁴⁰ Since the Blue Book was based on evidence collected by South African forces on behalf of the British government, it incurs certain methodological questions because of its subjectivity.⁴¹ Of course, this does not mean that the

35 J. Silvester and J-B. Gewald, *Words Cannot Be Found: German Colonial Rule in Namibia: An Annotated Reprint of the 1918 Blue Book* (Leiden, Brill, 2003).

36 British Library, 08157.f.8, Deutsche Reichskolonialamt, *The Treatment of Native and other Populations in the Colonial Possessions of Germany and England: An Answer to the English Blue Book of August 1918* (Berlin, 1919), pp. 50–55.

37 Lindner, 'Hybrid Cultures', p. 5.

38 Lindner, 'German Colonialism', p. 262.

39 L.H. Gann, 'The Berlin Conference and the Humanitarian Conscience', in S. Förster, W.J. Mommsen and R. Robinson (eds), *Bismarck Europe and Africa: The Berlin Africa Conference 1884–1885 and the Onset of Partition* (Oxford, Oxford University Press, 1988), pp. 330–31.

40 Silvester and Gewald, *Words Cannot Be Found*, p. xv.

41 Twomey, 'Narratives and Imperial Rivalry', p. 225, and Eckl, 'The Herero Genocide', p. 37.

atrocities that it describes did not happen, for they did. It does, however, call for careful handling of this particular source when using it to ascertain Britain's perceptions and involvement.

Most information collated in the Blue Book is based predominantly on records from the courts, reports of trials against locals following the rebellion, and, in many cases, on oral accounts by survivors of the genocide.⁴² While this source material is very useful and illustrative, it is far from comprehensive, as it portrays the British as bystanders who knew nothing or little of the horrors suffered by the Herero and Nama until the invasion in 1915.⁴³ This exercise in selective memory reveals the Blue Book's intentionally skewed portrayal of British actions vis-à-vis German atrocities as they occurred in 1904–8. If the British knew nothing of the atrocities until 1915, they could deny any complicity and, by extension, lay claim to the region as its benevolent protector in 1918. In order to legitimise the invasion of GSWA and to push for the confiscation of German colonies, the Blue Book sought to prove that Germany had violated Article 6 of the Berlin Treaty, which stated that it was the 'sacred duty of colonial powers to preserve the aboriginal races of Africa, watching over their interests and cultivating their moral and material advancement'.⁴⁴ As Kössler has correctly argued, the Blue Book seeks to depict the moral superiority of British colonialism.⁴⁵ This is further made clear by the statement in the Blue Book that German colonialists were a 'failure' and have 'never shown the slightest disposition to learn the natives' point-of-view'.⁴⁶ By portraying mismanagement as intrinsic to German colonialism, the Blue Book claimed that it would 'convince the most confirmed sceptic of the unsuitability of the Germans to control natives, and also to show him what can be expected if the unfortunate natives are ever again being handed back to the former regime'.⁴⁷ This served to illustrate that the Germans were not only conducting illegal activities in their colonies but were altogether incapable of governing colonies.

This purpose, and that of obscuring Britain's involvement, is exemplified by the Blue Book's portrayal of a key event. In 1907, British forces, acting on German requests, intercepted and killed the rebel leader Jakob Marengo, whom German authorities had wanted dead for years.⁴⁸ The skirmish proved to be of excessive violence and was of such severity that the commanding officer, Major Elliot, may have coined the term 'overkill' when describing the brutality of the affair.⁴⁹ Still, the outcome 'satisfied both British and German authorities'.⁵⁰ According to the Blue Book, however, the same event is described as a lamentable exception, regretting 'that even one British bullet should have aided in that horrible outpouring of human blood'.⁵¹ Contrarily, in 1907 the Cape Colony governor, Walter Hely-Hutchinson, believed that it was the 'duty' of the British to render assistance to Germany.⁵² Even the outspoken humanitarian Foreign Secretary, Edward Grey, considered the Marengo affair to be something that 'ought to be dealt with at once'.⁵³ Nevertheless, the decision to pursue Marengo was not made before Kaiser Wilhelm II had personally informed King Edward VII, while both were on vacation in Marienbad, that: '[i]t is very desirable this dangerous rebellion should finally be quelled. Will your government compel [the] Cape government to assist us?'⁵⁴ The actions of the British pertaining to the Marengo affair, therefore, were known

42 Silvester and Gewald, *Words Cannot Be Found*, pp. xviii–xix.

43 Administrator's Office, Windhuk: 'Report on the Natives of South-West Africa and their Treatment by Germany' (London, 1918), in Silvester and Gewald, *Words Cannot Be Found*, p. 9.

44 The National Archives, Kew (hereafter TNA), FO 881/5181, General Act, 1885, Article 6 and Administrator's Office, 'Report on the Natives', pp. 33–4.

45 R. Kössler, 'Sjambok or Cane? Reading the Blue Book', *Journal of Southern African Studies*, 30, 3 (2004), p. 708.

46 Administrator's Office, 'Report on the Natives', p. 15.

47 *Ibid.*, pp. 17–18.

48 TNA, FO 64/1645, General-Consul for British South Africa, D.H. von Jacobs, to Prime Minister, Cape Town, 12 September 1904.

49 J. Masson, 'A Fragment of Colonial History: The Killing of Jakob Marengo', *Journal of Southern African Studies*, 21, 2 (1995), p. 255.

50 J. Masson, *Jakob Marengo: An Early Resistance Hero of Namibia* (Windhoek, 2001), pp. 52–3.

51 Administrator's Office, 'Report on the Natives', p. 168.

52 TNA, FO 367/63, Hutchinson to Secretary of State for the Colonies, the Earl of Elgin, 8 August 1907.

53 TNA, FO 367/63, Grey to Elgin, 9 August 1907.

54 TNA, FO 367/63, Ambassador to Austro-Hungarian Empire, E. Goschen, to Grey, 16 August 1907.

throughout the hierarchy of the British government. Indeed, after Marengo was shot, Hely-Hutchinson spared little time in communicating his pleasure, to governor Lindequist in GSWA, at the successful Anglo-German collaboration.⁵⁵ From Whitehall's perspective, the recent Anglo-Russian Entente (31 August 1907) had harmed relations with Germany.⁵⁶ Therefore there was little reason to suffer further bad relations with Germany over Marengo's life. In fact, collaboration may have improved relations, as Britain's ambassador in Berlin, Frank Lascelles, informed Grey that the sentiment in the German press was that Britain had won Germany's war.⁵⁷

Another noteworthy British perspective on the affair, from as late as 1916, by historian and traveller Albert Calvert, asserts that Britain had justly assisted Germany in killing an outlaw. Marengo's death is portrayed with nationalistic pride by Calvert, as it supposedly 'fanned the jealousy of German officials' and awarded Major Elliot 'the coveted Kaiser Medallie'.⁵⁸ Unlike the Blue Book, the views expressed by Calvert and contemporary officials indicate that such violence was an acceptable method of colonial warfare. Moreover, Calvert did not deride German colonialists for their use of violent methods but for their lack of efficiency in employing them.⁵⁹ Thus, while the Marengo affair is depicted as regrettable in 1918, contemporaneously and during the First World War it was merely an acceptable act to assist a fellow European colonising power, and a moment of which Britain could be proud.

Further complications emerge when juxtaposing Calvert's account with that of the Blue Book. First is the issue of the treatment of Herero and Nama prisoners by Germany. Second is the disagreement on the scale of the genocide. In regard to the first issue, the Blue Book condemns the genocidal practices of prisoners being 'kept in captivity under such conditions that the majority died' and the survivors being 'exiled as forced labourers'.⁶⁰ Calvert, however, suggests that the labour scheme, in which prisoners were forcibly distributed to farms and mines, was a failure owing not to ill-treatment, but to of the 'perverseness and laziness of the natives'.⁶¹ Considering the issue of forced labour in a regional context, similar views were expressed by British officials in the aftermath of the 1896 Ndebele-Shona rising in Rhodesia, where a harsh labour scheme – a main cause for the rising – was, by many, deemed necessary to boost the economy and teach the Ndebele and Shona the supposed virtues of labour.⁶² However, in the shadow of Woodrow Wilson's Fourteen Principles, overt statements of coercion were ill-advised; the authors of the Blue Book knew as much.⁶³ Therefore, German ill-treatment of indigenous peoples was emphasised, while any indication of British involvement and consent was suppressed: '[c]an anyone allege that these poor mild-mannered creatures who had borne the German yoke for over fourteen years had no justification for the steps they took?'⁶⁴ The poorly armed, innocent 'creatures', encumbered by women and children, did not stand a chance against Germany's ruthless war machine. This rather romanticised depiction, accurate as it may be, serves only to obscure Britain's actions and perceptions in 1904. Though contemporary correspondence and other sources prove that many refugees found a safe haven in British territory, particularly after the battle of Waterberg,⁶⁵ British authorities did little to save their fighting men from German persecution, and sometimes even contributed to the German counter-insurgency.⁶⁶

The second issue, regarding the scale of the genocide, is complicated by Calvert's estimation

55 TNA, FO 367/63, Hutchinson to Governor of GSWA, 2 October 1907.

56 Kennedy, *Anglo-German Antagonism*, p. 441.

57 TNA, FO 367/63, F. Lascelles to Grey, 25 September 1907.

58 A. Calvert, *South West Africa during the German Occupation 1894–1914* (London, T.W. Laurie, 1916), p. 32.

59 *Ibid.*, p. 8.

60 Administrator's Office, 'Report on the Natives', p. 173.

61 Calvert, *South West Africa*, pp. 23–4.

62 TNA, CO 879/52, High Commissioner to South Africa, A. Milner, to Secretary of State for the Colonies, J. Chamberlain, 13 October 1897.

63 W. Roger Louis, *Germany's Lost Colonies, 1914–1919* (Oxford, Oxford University Press, 1967), p. 99.

64 Administrator's Office, 'Report on the Natives', p. 103.

65 TNA, FO 64/1645, Lt. Bruce to Commander-in-Chief, Cape Station, 19 July 1904.

66 Lindner, *Koloniale Begegnungen*, p. 239.

that approximately 20,000 Herero died in 1904–8.⁶⁷ Whether or not this number is accurate, he was clearly aware that murder had been committed on a massive scale and seemingly cared little. However, such numbers are small compared to the Blue Book's estimation that precisely 92,258 people had been killed by the Germans. This rather exact figure is calculated by comparing a census from 1877 with one from 1911.⁶⁸ While it is not the aim here to discuss which of these, or indeed other estimations, are correct, there can be little doubt that such disparate figures are problematic. Neither of these (and in fact most others') estimations takes into account a cataclysmic rinderpest epidemic which, according to the White Book, reduced the Herero stock of cattle to less than five per cent of its original size, causing severe famine.⁶⁹ While the White Book is equally subjective in terms of representing the colonial past of Britain and Germany, this estimation is verified by independent papers dealing specifically with the rinderpest.⁷⁰ In consulting the census of 1911, Werner Hillebrecht has also found the Blue Book's estimations to be exaggerated. However, as he rightly observes, an unclear death toll does not disprove the classification of the atrocities in GSWA as a genocide.⁷¹ Questioning the accuracy of the figures is one thing, but what is important is to ascertain the underlying intentions of the Blue Book in publishing those exact figures. Perhaps the Blue Book exaggerates the number of victims as part of the wider diplomatic strategy at Versailles: the higher the figures, the crueller German colonialism appeared. For his part, Calvert nonchalantly refers to the massacre of thousands as if it mattered little in the wider scheme of things. For, in his view, and perhaps in that of many of his contemporaries, Germany's conduct was a messy yet acceptable attempt to quell an illegitimate uprising by a supposedly inferior race.

Despite the Blue Book's subjectivity, later views on it as a source have been divided. According to Olusoga and Erichsen, the Blue Book 'stands almost entirely alone as a reliable and comprehensive exploration of the disinheritance and destruction of indigenous peoples' in the history of colonialism in Africa.⁷² Lau, on the other hand, claims the Blue Book to be a 'piece of war propaganda with no credibility whatsoever'.⁷³ Although it is certainly a problematic source, it does provide us with a detailed, albeit subjective, account of the genocidal horrors. But this very subjectivity is the crux of the matter, as it not only constitutes a way in which colonialism was remembered selectively, but also shows how it was utilised diplomatically at Versailles.

Nevertheless, as the White Book contends, the brutal methods employed by Germany were not unique. The aforementioned Ndebele–Shona rising remains a comparable example of British brutality in quelling so-called 'native risings'.⁷⁴ In this particular case, British forces scrupulously used dynamite to blow up caves in which women and children had sought refuge.⁷⁵ In responding to critique of such measures, Edward Fairfield of the Colonial Office simply replied that 'the use of mines [dynamite] is a necessary incident of warfare' and that the use of such methods was not 'inconsistent with the ordinary usages of civilised nations', which, it must be surmised, included Germany, in Fairfield's and many others' view.⁷⁶ Therefore, the tendency to employ violent methods was evident not only in GSWA, thus questioning the exceptionalism and continuity therefrom. Colonial warfare was not restricted to military objectives, but aimed for the complete subjugation of indigenous peoples.⁷⁷ The ruthless quelling of the Ndebele–Shona rising and the

67 Calvert, *South West Africa*, pp. 24–5.

68 Administrator's Office, 'Report on the Natives', pp. 60–62.

69 Deutsche Reichskolonialamt, *Treatment of Native and Other Populations*, p. 43.

70 D. Gilfoyle, 'Veterinary Research and the African Rinderpest Epizootic: The Cape Colony 1896–1898', *Journal of Southern African Studies*, 29, 1 (2003), p. 136; P. Phoofofo, 'Epidemics and Revolutions: The Rinderpest Epidemics in Late Nineteenth-Century Southern Africa', *Past and Present*, 138, 1 (1993), p. 126.

71 Hillebrecht, 'Certain Uncertainties', pp. 82–3.

72 Erichsen and Olusoga, *The Kaiser's Holocaust*, p. 264.

73 Lau, 'Uncertain Certainties', p. 46.

74 Deutsche Reichskolonialamt, *Treatment of Native and Other Populations*, p. 50. See also Wellington, *South West Africa and its Human Issues*, pp. 250–53.

75 TNA, War Office [WO] 33/117, Confidential Report by Capt. H.S. Walker [undated] 1898, p. 99.

76 TNA, CO 879/47: E. Fairfield to W. Evans, 22 October 1896.

77 See, for instance, G. Krüger, *Kriegsbewältigung und Geschichtsbewusstsein: Realität, Deutung und Verarbeitung des deutschen Kolonialkrieges in Namibia, 1904 bis 1907* (Göttingen, Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1999), pp. 62–3, where the

concentration camps of the second Anglo-Boer war bear witness to this.⁷⁸ Consequently, as such practices and the awareness of their use crossed colonial boundaries, it is difficult to imagine that the British had little or no idea of the massacre that happened on their doorstep in southern Africa in 1904–8, as implied by the Blue Book ten years later.

Contemporary Involvement and Perceptions

Historical sources such as the Blue Book are revealing in their own right. However, it is crucial to examine the written traces of cross-border colonial administration as it occurred at the time to understand the context. The extant correspondence between German and British officials, as well as internal British communications, indicate what British officials thought of, and how they dealt with, the situation. This may shed further light on how German colonialism, and colonialism in general, was perceived by contemporaries. From the sources, four main issues emanating from the troubles in GSWA concerned British officials.

First, the GSWA war was feared to be a pretext for a German invasion of British southern Africa. This was especially alarming in the event that Britain should find itself embroiled in a war with Germany in Europe. Second, and in continuation of the first, was that the war in GSWA was a disguise to mobilise and arm Boer irregulars in preparation for a rebellion in South Africa assisted by German troops. Third was the arrangements to be made for the African refugees fleeing into British territory from GSWA. Fourth was the fear of a spill-over effect – in the shape of a ‘native rising’ – caused by the cross-border movements of Africans, or as a response to British support to the Germans.

The first two issues posed a clear and rationally deduced threat to the already fragile British territories still recovering from the second Anglo-Boer war.⁷⁹ In a telegram to the Secretary of State for the Colonies, Alfred Lyttelton, the High Commissioner to South Africa, the Earl of Selbourne, estimated that no less than 16,000 German soldiers were mobilised and would soon be increased to 30,000. Among those, they had ‘recruited between three and four thousands Boers, and are recruiting still’. This, Selbourne warned, would put Germany ‘in a position to squeeze us’.⁸⁰ In spite of such cautions, Lyttelton seemingly remained calm when he replied: ‘[i]t would appear that the large number of German troops is due to a policy of crushing rebels by main force. For his part, Hutchinson says that he personally believe the most “disquieting feature in the matter” is the recruitment of Boers in German service’ [*sic*].⁸¹

Not only does this correspondence between prominent officials display the hierarchy of British anxieties, it also proves that they were both aware of, and unconcerned by, the savagery inflicted upon the rebels in GSWA. In face of such evidence, the Blue Book’s condemnation of German atrocities rings hollow. For when these atrocities were being committed, British officials were far more fearful of the mere speculation that Germany would invade, and of that ‘most disquieting feature in the matter’ – the recruitment of Boer volunteers into German service. The feasibility of an invasion was questioned by the military attaché to the British embassy in Berlin, Count von Gleichen, who believed that Germany possessed an insufficient naval presence in the region.⁸² Furthermore, the alleged 16,000 troops employed proved ‘barely sufficient to secure total victory in GSWA itself’, as they had ‘too much trouble with the guerrilla war’.⁸³ In time, a possible German invasion was deemed improbable.⁸⁴

Fears of Germany being a threat to British southern Africa did not occur in a vacuum. On 3 January 1896, in the wake of the ill-fated Jameson Raid, the Kaiser had sent the notorious Kruger

same rhetoric as Schlieffen’s during the Franco-Prussian war is taken into account.

78 Lindner, ‘German Colonialism’, p. 257.

79 Dederling, ‘The Ferreira Raid of 1906’, pp. 46–7.

80 TNA, FO 64/1646, Selbourne to Lyttelton, 24 May 1905.

81 TNA, FO 64/1646, Lyttelton to Selbourne, 5 June 1905.

82 TNA, FO 64/1645, Report by von Gleichen, enclosed in Lascelles to Secretary of State, Lord Lansdowne, 9 April 1904, pp. 1–2.

83 TNA, FO 64/1646, J.B. Whitehead, British Embassy, Berlin, to Lascelles, 13 June 1905.

84 Dederling, ‘The Ferreira Raid of 1906’, pp. 50–51.

Telegram to the president of the Transvaal, Paul Kruger, congratulating him on defeating the raiders.⁸⁵ This support for Kruger spawned great anger in Britain, igniting the bonfires of jingoism and playing a pivotal part in the antagonism between Britain and Germany. Furthermore, the situation was aggravated by suspicions that Germany had supplied rifles and ammunition to the Boers during the second Anglo-Boer war. In 1904, Britain had neither forgotten nor was willing to forgive such acts.⁸⁶ It therefore appears reasonable that British officials not only considered the quelling of the Herero and Nama to be a pretext for a German invasion but also as a possible ploy to re-arm and mobilise Boer irregulars. A secret military report from 1905 asserted that Boer leaders were 'relying on certain German promises of assistance in case of rebellion'. However, due to the war in GSWA taking on 'proportions which the Germans never dreamt', German authorities found it necessary to seek a 'temporary friendship' with Britain if the Herero and Nama were to be defeated.⁸⁷ The stance of British officials was, therefore, ambiguous. On the one hand, they feared that the presence of the *Schutztruppe* could result in conflict. On the other hand, they were aware that Germany could not afford to alienate Britain if they wished to quell the rebellion successfully, because of Britain's naval dominance in the area. Furthermore, with the arrival of the *Schutztruppe*, the number of troops soon exceeded the number of settlers, rendering GSWA more dependent on imports from the Cape than ever before.⁸⁸ On the borders, the co-operation of the South African border police was crucial in order to prevent rebels from establishing hide-outs in British territory. Yet German troops often crossed into British territory pursuing rebels, enraging British officials by violating their sovereignty.⁸⁹

Despite the apparent German dependence on British co-operation, fears of the undesirable situation in GSWA spilling into British territory in one way or another persisted. A secret military report, including an interview with Stephane Kock, brother to former Boer General Johannes Kock, may have stirred British fears. Kock explicitly stated that the purpose of recruiting Boers into German service was 'to take men to GSWA nominally to assist the German transports, but really to be armed and ready to proceed to the Transvaal when the general rising took place'. Kock even explained that this rising was initially to have taken place in the summer of 1905 but was continuously postponed, leaving Boer volunteers in GSWA dissatisfied.⁹⁰ Although a Boer rising in Transvaal did not occur – the closest perhaps being the Ferreira Raid in 1906 – the intention certainly existed. Counter-factually, one could argue that a potential third Anglo-Boer war was avoided owing to the success of guerrilla warfare in GSWA.⁹¹

British officials upheld their 'friendly neutrality' in order to make sure that they antagonised neither Germans nor Boers.⁹² However, being on too good terms with the Germans risked antagonising Africans related to the Herero and Nama and residing in British territory. Therefore, Britain's involvement in the treatment of the indigenous peoples – whether or not they were active in the rebellion against Germany – became intrinsic to their stance on the affair. The flow of refugees after Waterberg brought this matter straight to their doorstep.⁹³ Estimates of Herero refugees in Bechuanaland range from 2,000–3,000 to 6,000–9,000.⁹⁴ Steps to allow refugees to

85 The Kruger Telegram (1896), available at http://germanhistorydocs.ghi-dc.org/sub_document.cfm?document_id=754, retrieved 10 November 2015.

86 P. Brendon, *The Decline and Fall of the British Empire, 1781–1997* (New York, Vintage, 2008), pp. 197–8.

87 TNA, FO 64/1646, Secret Report, Military Intelligence Department, enclosed in Hutchinson to Lyttelton, 21 June 1905.

88 Erichsen and Olusoga, *The Kaiser's Holocaust*, pp. 141–2.

89 Dederling, 'The Ferreira Raid of 1906', p. 46.

90 TNA, FO 64/1646, Secret Report, Military Intelligence Department, enclosed in Hutchinson to Lyttelton, 5 July 1905, pp. 1–2.

91 Dederling, 'The Ferreira Raid of 1906', p. 43.

92 Lindner, *Koloniale Begegnungen*, p. 253.

93 *Ibid.*, p. 255.

94 F.R. Vivel, 'The Entry of the Herero into Botswana', *Botswana Notes and Records*, 8 (1976), pp. 39–40, and R. Pennington and H. Harpending, 'How Many Refugees Were There? History and Population Change Among the Herero and Mbanderu of Northwestern Botswana', *Botswana Notes and Records*, 23 (1991), p. 209. For a cultural history of

cross the border without being extradited to the German authorities were taken as early as November 1903, when the Bondelswarts in southern GSWA rose in rebellion.⁹⁵ This, and the suspicion that Britain supplied the rebels with weapons and ammunition, caused great resentment among the Germans.⁹⁶ Such suspicions soon became widespread and were intensified by rumours of British agents having played a part in rousing the Herero to take up arms.⁹⁷

Due to the continuous influx of refugees, British authorities were faced with the task of providing accommodation, food, clothing and medicine. This led Britain to seek compensation from the German Reichstag.⁹⁸ Such requests, however, were adamantly rejected, as the refugees were accused of having ‘committed murder and atrocious crimes against the white population’ and had only sought to escape a ‘well-deserved punishment’. Therefore the Reichstag was not ‘able to extend the principles of humanity to these natives in the same way as European refugees’.⁹⁹ Nevertheless, British officials saw potential in the refugees as a useful source of labour, particularly for mines and farms still recovering from the recent war.¹⁰⁰ Indeed, many Herero refugees migrated into the Transvaal to seek work in the mining industry, possibly owing to the poor conditions of the refugee camps, where many died of diseases and had little to sustain a livelihood.¹⁰¹ Yet the influx of refugees necessitated an expansion of the police force to prevent ‘interferences with native waters, which would at once cause serious unrest among our own tribes’.¹⁰² In Bechuanaland, this was resolved when the Tawana chief, Segkoma, permitted the Herero refugees to settle in the Sehitwa and Nokaneng districts.¹⁰³ Therefore it was not only British refugee policy and their disinclination to extradite that saved many refugees. African communities in Botswana and elsewhere also integrated them into their society, giving them work and assisting them in rebuilding and sustaining their livelihoods.¹⁰⁴

Nevertheless, fears among British officials persisted, that by granting refugees access they were inviting ‘criminals’ into British territory, where they could potentially stage a new rebellion much like the one in GSWA.¹⁰⁵ The anxiety about an indigenous rising being instigated either by the cross-border movements of refugees and rebels or through British collaboration antagonising African tribes related to the Herero and Nama clearly influenced British actions.¹⁰⁶ Thus British collaboration was not straightforward, but ambiguous and even contradictory. While Britain was willing to assist Germany, it could be done only if it did not antagonise their own colonial subjects or, if possible, in secrecy.¹⁰⁷ Indicatively, while the refugee camps in British territory were under

the Herero refugees and the ancestors in Botswana, see K. Alnaes, ‘Living with the Past: The Songs of the Herero in Botswana’, *Africa*, 59, 3 (1989), pp. 267–99.

95 TNA, FO 64/1645, Hutchinson to Lyttelton, 18 November 1903.

96 Lindner, *Koloniale Begegnungen*, pp. 256–7.

97 Bundesarchiv, Lichterfelde, R1001/2111, Der Chef des Admiralstabs der Marine to Auswärtiges Amt, Kolonial Abteilung, 16 February 1904.

98 Lindner, *Koloniale Begegnungen*, p. 254.

99 TNA, FO 64/1646, von Jacobs to Major-General E. Smith-Brook, 24 December 1904, enclosed in Hutchinson to Lyttelton, 25 February 1905.

100 TNA, FO 64/1645, Resident Commissioner, Mafeking, F. Panzera to Governor of Transvaal and Orange River Colony, A. Milner, 7 October 1904, enclosed in Milner to Lyttelton, 17 October 1904.

101 TNA, CO 417/442, Selbourne to Elgin, 28 January 1907. See also Dederling, ‘War and Mobility’, pp. 286–88, and Curson, *Border Conflicts*, pp. 136–7, for the refugee camps. For the emigration to the Rand, see J-B. Gewald, ‘The Road of a Man Called Love and the Sack of Sero: The Herero–German War and the Export of Herero Labour to the South African Rand’, *Journal of African Studies*, 40, 1 (1999), pp. 21–40, where it is suggested that the pre-war export of labour may even have been a factor in the outbreak of the war.

102 TNA FO 64/1645, Panzera to Milner, 7 October 1904, enclosed in Milner to Lyttelton, 17 October 1904.

103 Pennington and Harpending, ‘How Many Refugees Were There?’, p. 210. The Herero relations with Segkoma were not straightforward and had political ramifications. See J-B. Gewald, ‘“I was Afraid of Samuel, Therefore I Came to Segkoma”: Herero Refugees and Patronage Politics in Ngamiland, Bechuanaland Protectorate, 1890–1914’, *Journal of African History*, 43, 2 (2002), pp. 211–34.

104 Pennington and Harpending, ‘How Many Refugees Were There?’, p. 217.

105 TNA, FO 64/1645, Panzera to Milner, 3 November 1904.

106 Kuss, *Deutsches Militär*, p. 321.

107 Dederling, ‘War and Mobility’, p. 283.

such lax security that it may have caused resentment among the Germans, they still collaborated in attempting to impose control of the borderlands by, for instance, allowing the Germans to store weapons and ammunition in British territory.¹⁰⁸ Furthermore, as soon as a band of refugees had crossed the border, they were disarmed, taken into custody and items thought to have been stolen were returned to German authorities.¹⁰⁹

The precarious and confusing situation in the borderlands was capitalised on by many resistance fighters, most notably Marengo and Simon Kooper.¹¹⁰ It was only after having been granted permission by the British authorities that the *Schutztruppe* defeated Kooper in a skirmish well within Bechuanaland.¹¹¹ Despite a costly victory for the Germans, Kooper escaped and the Germans made a deal with him that he would remain in Lokwabe, in modern day Botswana, far away from the border. In return, Kooper received a substantial yearly pension, which the Germans negotiated through the British.¹¹² Overall, Britain ostensibly sought not to provoke Germans, Boers or Africans during the conflict in GSWA. However, considering this non-confrontational approach in the light of both the Kooper and Marengo affairs, the Janus-faced position of British officials is evident. On the one hand, they protected refugees and, at least on paper, prevented German troops from pursuing them; on the other hand, they assisted the Germans in doing exactly that, either by occasionally allowing the Germans to cross the border or by hunting down rebels themselves.

This proves the precariously ambivalent Anglo-German relationship of the time. On the one hand, they suspected one another of subversion, and on the other hand they were willing to assist each other in consolidating colonial rule in the region. Indeed, Lindner has suggested that Britain and Germany were involved in a common ‘colonial project’ in the subjugation of Africans.¹¹³ Similar views have been expressed by Michael Fröhlich, who emphasised the ‘solidarity of the white race’, and Horst Dreschler, who claimed that the most ‘dominant feature’ in Anglo-German relations after 1890 was co-operation in oppressing Africans.¹¹⁴ The idea of a shared project gives way to a transnational understanding of Anglo-German imperialism, but it is perhaps too definitive and explicit to characterise it as a shared ‘project’. A project necessitates terms agreed upon beforehand, almost a conspiracy, and while the Berlin treaty or the Zanzibar–Heligoland treaty (1890) may exemplify this, such treaties were not strictly followed in reality. In a report from 1909, German colonial policy in GSWA was assessed to ‘draw the British along with them in their difficulties and they endeavour to impress the native mind that there is no difference between Germans and Englishmen’.¹¹⁵ The same report stated that this policy ‘has been aided and abetted’ by Britain by collaborating with the Germans against both Marengo and Kooper. This conflation of German and British colonial policy alarmed British officials, as it would ‘gradually eat away our authority amongst our own native subjects’, who ‘would be of great assistance’ in invading GSWA.¹¹⁶ This proved to be the case during the South African invasion in 1915.¹¹⁷ Therefore, instead of defining this as a shared colonial project, Britain and Germany in southern Africa had an occasional reciprocal, yet always circumstantial, relationship. Official actors operated on an *ad hoc* basis; there was no directive or neatly stated policy from London, Berlin or elsewhere. Yet British and German colonial interests, though not necessarily aligned, were intricately entangled, hence suggestive of an – often unconscious – understanding between the colonial powers in consolidating

108 *Ibid.*, pp. 282–3.

109 TNA, FO 64/1645, Lyttelton to Milner, 26 November 1904.

110 W.D. Haacke, ‘The Kalahari Expedition, March 1908: The Forgotten Story of the Final Battle of the Nama War’, *Botswana Notes and Record*, 24 (1992), p. 2.

111 *Ibid.*, p. 12, and, for the permission to cross the border, see TNA, CO 417/437, Selbourne to Elgin, 6 November 1907, and TNA, CO 417/438, Selbourne to Elgin, 25 November 1907.

112 TNA, CO 879/102, Selbourne to Grey, 2 February 1909.

113 Lindner, *Koloniale Begegnungen*, p. 458.

114 Fröhlich, *Von Konfrontation zur Koexistenz*, p. 266, and Dreschler, ‘*Let Us Die Fighting*’, p. 138.

115 TNA, FO 367/136, Intelligence Report by Captain H.S.P. Simon, 6 March 1909, enclosed in Hutchinson to The Secretary of State for the Colonies, The Earl of Crewe, p. 2.

116 *Ibid.*, pp. 3–4.

117 A. Grundlingh, *Fighting Their Own War: South African Blacks and the First World War* (Johannesburg, Ravan Press, 1987), pp. 58–60.

colonial rule and stability. Although British authorities were, at times, willing to lend support to Germany in enforcing their colonial rule, this came second to securing their own territory.

In order to monitor the conflict, the British deployed Colonel Frederick Trench as military attaché to the German military command. A move undoubtedly intended to keep a check on the *Schutztruppe*, it also provided Britain with information on the genocidal horrors. Trench was a *persona grata* in the Kaiser's court, and his many reports almost exclusively addressed military issues such as communications, supply lines and troop movements.¹¹⁸ Therefore, his rare accounts on the terrible conditions of the prisoners stand out:

[t]he number of prisoners at the hands of the authorities at Lüderitzbucht, Swakopmund etc. does not increase. The Chief Staff Officer tells me that of the 7000 Hereros, Hottentots etc. 500 die every month on an average. 'The sea air and the food they get do not agree with them!' [*sic*]¹¹⁹

Trench provides a startling insight into the horrors suffered by the indigenous peoples of GSWA. Reporting on the Shark Island camp, Trench noted that: 'Dante might have written a notice for the gate', unwittingly foreshadowing the *arbeit macht frei* sign less than 40 years later.¹²⁰ According to Trench, the Germans' attitude towards the use of concentration camps was that they were a useful tool in dealing with guerrilla warfare. But the camps established by the British during the second Anglo-Boer war were, to the Germans, far more inhuman, as they were used to intern white Boers, unlike those in GSWA intended for the supposedly inferior Africans.¹²¹

Given that Trench, and his later replacement, Major Wade, stayed with the German military command for years, there can be no doubt that British officials in both Cape Town and London knew of the horrors in GSWA – in detail and in real time.¹²² Moreover, these reports confirmed the accounts given to the border police by refugees.¹²³ As a result, Britain was in effect faced with a new Casement report. This report of 1904 brought the horrors of King Leopold II's regime in the Congo Free State to light and subsequently led to major public protests. As a result, the Foreign Office under Grey successfully pushed for the Belgian government to take control of the Congo. Such similarity is also apparent when Grey simply noted, on the front page of the aforementioned 1909 report, that the situation in GSWA was 'as bad as the Congo'.¹²⁴ Unlike his Belgian contemporary, Kaiser Wilhelm and the German nation were spared the anger of the British public and media, despite committing a full-scale genocide.¹²⁵ Arguably, the suspicion towards imperialism in Africa brought about by the Congo crisis affected British officials in their dealings with GSWA, as they did little to acknowledge the horrors unfolding. This indicates a reluctance to put imperialism, whether British or German, under further scrutiny. Indeed, another comment to the above 1909 report stated that it was not 'necessary to send this report to Berlin'.¹²⁶ This reluctance implies an understanding between the colonial powers pertaining to the stability of colonial rule, whether in metropolitan Europe or in the colonies themselves. This does not indicate a project, but rather suggests a subtle mutual understanding.

Such an understanding, however, was ignored by Britain when they saw fit to use their knowledge of the genocidal horrors as a diplomatic instrument in 1918, claiming that Germany was

118 Lindner, *Koloniale Begegnungen*, pp. 240–41.

119 TNA, FO 64/1647, Colonel F. Trench to Chief Staff Officer, Cape Town, 3 October 1903.

120 TNA, FO 367/8, Trench to the War Office, London, 15 March 1906, pp. 8–9.

121 TNA, FO 64/1647, Trench to Lansdowne, 15 November 1905. For a recent study of the camps, see J. Kreienbaum, 'Deadly Learning? Concentration Camps in Colonial Wars Around 1900', in Barth and Cvetkovski (eds), *Imperial Co-operation*, pp. 219–36.

122 Lindner, *Koloniale Begegnungen*, p. 242.

123 TNA, FO 65/1647, Major Berrange to Commander, Cape Mounted Police, 20 October 1905.

124 W. Roger Louis, 'Great Britain and German Expansion in Africa', in Gifford and Louis (eds), *Britain and Germany in Africa*, p. 34.

125 For the Congo Crisis and the British public opinion, see W. Roger Louis, 'Roger Casement and the Congo', *Journal of African History*, 5, 1 (1964), pp. 99–120, and, recently, D. Pavlakis, *British Humanitarianism and the Congo Reform Movement, 1896–1913* (New York, Routledge, 2016).

126 TNA, FO 367/136, Intelligence Report by Captain H.S.P. Simon, 6 March 1909.

an exceptional and incompetent colonial power. This conveniently came at a time when Germany was widely seen as an aggressor, owing to its belligerent role in the First World War. This was true not only in Europe but also in GSWA, with reports of African prisoners of war being severely mistreated and mutilated by the Germans.¹²⁷ Therefore, any complaints from the Germans about British misdemeanours in Africa, as portrayed in the White Book, could easily be deflected by pointing to German excesses.¹²⁸ Whereas the British government saw relatively little trouble in launching a humanitarian campaign against Leopold II, they had little motive to do so against Germany prior to the war. Of course, individual condemnations of the genocide were voiced in both London and the Cape, but, overall, official humanitarian concerns and views of the atrocities were subjected to broader realpolitik concerns. Germany was 'a boy too big to interfere with'.¹²⁹ With the outbreak of the Great War, however, these realpolitik obstructions were not only removed, but changed in favour of a smear campaign advocating humanitarian concerns over German colonialism as a whole.

Conclusion

British officials were mainly concerned with security issues emanating from the situation in GSWA, which could affect their territory. Thus, Britain's policy of 'friendly neutrality' was aimed at avoiding any ramifications and assisting the Germans in ending the situation promptly. As a result, their detailed knowledge of the immense suffering of the indigenous people of GSWA was ignored in 1904–8. Although British officials were concerned with German 'native policy', this concern was not primarily aimed at the actual suffering of the Herero and Nama people, but rather the consequences of Britain's complicity. It cannot be defined as a shared project, but it indicates a common Anglo-German standpoint on colonialism and colonial violence. Cross-border activities reveal a transnational co-operation between Britain and Germany, which may be interpreted as a mutual understanding regarding colonial administration and the quelling of 'native risings' in order to obtain stability. Such understanding and consent was purposely ignored in the aftermath of the First World War, as it would undermine any claims to confiscate Germany's overseas territory. Therefore it is crucial to ascertain the premises of the Blue Book, as a source not only to the events in GSWA themselves but also to Britain's perception and involvement and to British diplomatic aims in 1918.¹³⁰ This source contains significant biases and limitations, and hence contemporary British involvement and knowledge is portrayed in a way favourable to the diplomatic situation at Versailles rather than southern Africa in 1904–8.

While the colonial scandals as portrayed in the Blue Book were not directly responsible for the confiscation of Germany's colonies, it did, as Frank Bösch has shown, help to create an image of the 'brutal German' which 'impacted on Germany's reputation well after 1918'.¹³¹ Arguably, the idea of German colonial exceptionalism and the associated colonial *Sonderweg*, therefore, rests upon what may be called the legacy of the Blue Book.¹³² Valuable as it may be, the Blue Book does not represent a contemporary perception of colonialism and violence in GSWA. As it does not adhere to the views expressed by British actors in 1904–8, it is a source representing, when scrutinising British views on German colonialism, a selective memory. Indeed, prior to the outbreak of the First World War, German colonialism was, in general, considered acceptable and legitimate, particularly since Britain too was embroiled in several colonial scandals.¹³³ Many groups, such as

127 Grundlingh, *Fighting Their Own War*, pp. 86–7. Reports include cases of ears being cut off, eyes scooped out and even castration.

128 For Anglo-German views on colonial scandals, see F. Bösch, 'Are We a Cruel Nation? Colonial Practices, Perceptions and Scandal', in D. Geppert and R. Gerwarth (eds), *Wilhelmine Germany and Edwardian Britain: Essays on Cultural Affinity* (Oxford, Oxford University Press, 2008), pp. 115–42.

129 Louis, 'Great Britain and German Expansion', pp. 38 ff., 153.

130 Twomey, 'Narratives and Imperial Rivalry', pp. 215–16.

131 Bösch, 'Are We a Cruel Nation?', pp. 139–40.

132 Andreas Eckl has shown a correlation between the arguments of the Blue Book and Dreschler's "*Let Us Die Fighting*". See Eckl, 'The Herero Genocide', pp. 38–41.

133 Louis, *Germany's Lost Colonies*, p. 35. For British colonial violence, see, for instance, R. Gott, *Britain's Empire:*

the Aborigines' Protection Society, even advocated the transfer of Belgian and Portuguese territories to German rule, as well as British and French, as late as 1912.¹³⁴ All this only a few years after British officials received detailed reports on the genocide in GSWA.

The portrayal of the genocide in the Blue Book has historiographic implications. The Germans were not unique in their lack of concern for the immense suffering of Africans in their efforts to crush 'native rebellions' when these threatened colonial rule. Furthermore, cases of direct complicity, exemplified by the brutal killing of Marengo, are undeniable and suggest that Britain's stance of 'friendly neutrality' may have been too friendly. In the light of recent scholarship seeking to uncover transnational patterns, notions of German exceptionalism and continuity seem old-fashioned and problematic. In Africa, Germany was Britain's 'entangled other': on the one hand they were competitors but, on the other, they were collaborators in the violent subjugation of African dissidents. Therefore, British and German southern Africa cannot be seen as two separate entities.

The aim of this article has been to complement preceding scholarly contributions seeking to uncover the relations between Britain and Germany, and to enter the historiographical debate concerning the claims of continuity, parallels, causality and, especially, exceptionalism. As such, it has not been the purpose to refute either that the Third Reich had or had not any colonial roots. Instead, it makes the case for understanding the history of imperialism within a context where it is not contained by European national narratives, such as that of German exceptionalism.¹³⁵ Therefore, it is important that we continue to seek to understand German colonial history within its wider international and imperial framework and not as part of an obsolete and ethnocentric model that is no longer being applied to study other countries' imperial histories.¹³⁶ To re-work John Seeley's classic, *The Expansion of England* (1883), it is perhaps time that we moved beyond studying German colonialism as 'The Expansion of Germany'.

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Resistance, Repression and Revolt (London, Verso, 2011).

¹³⁴ Louis, 'Great Britain and German Expansion', p. 36.

¹³⁵ See also Dederling, 'War and Mobility', p. 294.

¹³⁶ Conrad, 'Rethinking German Colonialism', p. 544.